United Nations E/CN.6/2019/NGO/61

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
19 November 2018

Original: English

Commission on the Status of Women
Sixty-third session
11–22 March 2019
Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century"

Statement submitted by Afro-European Medical and Research Network, Federation of American Women's Clubs Overseas (FAWCO), Foundation for GAIA, Graduate Women International (GWI), Inter-African Committee on Traditional Practices Affecting the Health of Women and Children, International Alliance of Women, International Union for Land Value Taxation and Free Trade, Make Mothers Matter, Organisation pour la Communication en Afrique et de Promotion de la Cooperation Economique Internationale — OCAPROCE Internationale, Widows for Peace through Democracy and World Federation of Ukrainian Women's Organizations, non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

18-19677 (E) 101218

Please recycle

Statement

When paid work and unpaid care work is combined, women work more than men. Yet, women make up the majority of the world's poor — and most of them are mothers. Persistent gender inequality, which is rooted in gender norms, the division of assets, work and responsibilities, and the systematic devaluation of "women's work", adds to their vulnerability and perpetuates the feminization of poverty.

Social protection, whose main objectives are to reduce and prevent poverty, and to level off inequalities, is essential for women empowerment. In its most basic form, social protection includes the provision of essential health care, as well as income security along the life course — two pillars which are especially relevant to women in their role as mothers.

Universal health coverage and maternity protection is the cornerstone of a social protection system that works for women.

Health is the cornerstone of human development and a fundamental right. However, for half of the world's population, this basic need is far from satisfied, whether in developing countries, for lack of infrastructures, or in developed countries, for lack of access. Healthcare is especially crucial for women during pregnancy and around childbirth, both for the mother and the child. Universal health coverage must be achieved as a basic element of social protection.

Too many mothers still die today in relation to pregnancy. According to the World Health Organization, the global figure in 2015 was 216 deaths per 100,000 live births — with large disparities between regions. With the Sustainable Development Goals and target 3.1 United Nations Member States have committed to dividing this figure by three by 2030.

The example of the United States, where this mortality rate is increasing, shows the importance of social protection measures that have proven successful in many countries:

- Access to high-quality healthcare, including mental health, with antenatal visits for information and identification of high risk, as well as
- Maternity protection, including maternity leave an[illegible]e security.

Access to healthcare, especially in the first months of life is also essential to maximize the chances of survival and harmonious development of children. Social protection should go beyond essential healthcare in supporting parents, especially mothers in vulnerable situations, and ensuring that every child receives the nurturing care that will support their development to their full potential and make a difference for their future.

Healthcare infrastructure (including health centres and qualified health professional), which offers high quality maternal and child health services that are accessible for all, must be considered as one of the best investments a country can make, for both women empowerment and child development.

Beyond cash transfers: addressing the unequal distribution of unpaid family care work to empower women and lift them out of poverty.

Cash transfer is a proven social protection policy instrument to ensure income security along the life course. It is especially powerful when the beneficiaries are mothers: there is evidence from many studies that mothers typically spend their income on food, healthcare and the education for children, whereas men tend to spend a higher proportion of their income for personal needs.

However, reducing inequalities and poverty also requires addressing the root causes of women's particular vulnerabilities, beginning with their disproportionate share of unpaid family care work.

According to the International Labour Organisation, globally women perform 76.2 per cent of unpaid care work — that is the essential work and responsibility of maintaining the household and feeding and caring for family members. In poor rural households, women's work is also dominated by time-intensive activities such as water and firewood collection, as well as care of livestock and subsistence agriculture. All too often, women compensate through drudgery work the lack of basic infrastructure, water, and energy in particular. This large share of unpaid family care work results in women's "time poverty" and greatly limits their ability to perform other income-generating activities.

Addressing the unequal distribution of unpaid family care work should be part of any social protection policy that seeks to empower women. Therefore target 5.4 of the 2030 Agenda is also key for social protection, which should include policies to recognize, reduce and redistribute this work:

- The essential economic and social value of this work must be recognized by policymakers and society at large.
- Public Infrastructure and services investments must be directed at reducing women's time poverty and the time they spent on unpaid domestic chores and care work. Key infrastructure developments include clean energy, water and sanitation, but also transportation, mobile communication and information services, as well as diverse care services solutions; and as the first beneficiaries, women must be involved in their design and management.
- Unpaid family care work must be redistributed between men and women, but also between the family and the State and other actors in society.

Detailed recommendations along each of these "3 R" can be found on Make Mothers Matter's website.

In Conclusion

Social protection, the provision of public infrastructure and services and women empowerment are all intrinsically linked.

In particular, inter-linkages exist between the infrastructure and services that support the two pillars of social protection. Healthcare infrastructure and services also link to those same public infrastructure and services that also support the reduction of women's time poverty:

- Transportation (road and public transport) to facilitate access
- Clean water and sanitation as key elements of health, especially child health
- Clean energy for healthy cooking
- Internet and mobile communications for health information dissemination and e-health services.

Promoting women's participation in public life, in particular in local governments, is important ensure that women be involved in the design and management of both social protection policies and public infrastructure and services, so that they are tailored to their needs.

Social protection, supported by well-designed and functioning infrastructure and services, is essential to empower women, especially when they are in vulnerable

situations (notably single mothers, disabled women, mothers of disabled children, older women, widows, teenage mothers, etc.).

But women, especially mothers, are not only recipients of social protection: they produce and process food for the family; they are the primary educators of children and the first caregivers of dependent family members, including older persons; they actually provide basic health and care services, thus largely contributing to social protection. By raising the next generation of citizens and workers, they also support human development and contribute to building the future society and economy.

They must be recognized as powerful economic and social actors — who deserve to be better equipped and supported. Social protection is a human right that must be supported by universal public infrastructure and services. It must also be seen as an investment with high returns, especially when targeting the most vulnerable women and their children.